

of Romance; and that you cannot help thinking of enchanted castles, encounters with giants, solemn exorcisms, fortunate surprises, knights and wizards. You cannot exactly distinguish what the absurdity in my notions *is*, but you fancy what it is *like*. You therefore condemn it, not by defining its nature and exposing its irrationality, but by applying an epithet which arbitrarily assigns it to a class of things of which the absurdity stands notorious and unquestioned : for evidently the epithet should signify a resemblance to what is the prominent folly in the works of romance. Well then, take advantage of this resemblance, to bring your censure into something of a definite form. Delineate precisely the chief features of the absurdity of the works of romance, and then show how the same characteristics are flagrant on my notions or schemes. I will then renounce at once all my visionary follies, and be henceforward at least a very sober, if I cannot be a very rational man.

The great general characteristic of those works has been the ascendancy of imagination over judgment. And the description is correct as applied to the books however well endowed with intellect the authors of them might be. If they chose, for their own and others' amusement, to dismiss a sound judgment awhile from its office, to stimulate their imagination to the wildest extravagances, and to depicture the fantastic career in writing, the book might be partly the same thing as if produced by a mind in which sound judgment had no place; it would exhibit imagination *actually* ascendent by the writer's voluntary indulgence, though not *necessarily* so by the constitution of his mind. It was a different case, if a writer kept his judgment active amidst these very extravagances, with the intention of shaping and directing them to some particular end, of satire or sober truth. But however, the romances of the ages of chivalry and the preceding times were composed under neither of these intellectual conditions. They were not the productions either of men who, possessing a sound judgment, chose formally to suspend its exercise, in order to riot awhile in scenes of extravagant fancy, only keeping that judgment so far awake as to retain a continual consciousness in what degree they were extravagant; or of men designing to give effect to truth or malice under the disguise of a fantastic exhibition. It is evident that the authors were under th«